

Statement of Representative Ron Kind
Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System
3/13/03

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT DISPLAYED HISTORIC VISION AND TOOK A BOLD STEP FORWARD IN HIS QUEST TO PROTECT OUR NATION'S NATURAL WONDERS. HE DECIDED THAT THE PLIGHT OF ONE GROUP OF BIRDS ON A SCANT FIVE ACRES IN FLORIDA WAS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO WARRANT THE PROTECTION OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. ROOSEVELT MADE THIS DECISION ON MARCH 14, 1903, CONTINUING HIS COMMITMENT TO PROTECT AMERICAN PUBLIC LANDS. IN CREATING A NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, HOWEVER, ROOSEVELT BROUGHT THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON A GREAT IDEOLOGICAL DEPARTURE FROM THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING OUR NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM: WHILE THOSE LANDS ARE SET ASIDE FOR THE ENJOYMENT AND APPRECIATION OF PEOPLE, WILDLIFE REFUGES ARE FOR THE SOLE BENEFIT OF WILDLIFE. THIS IDEOLOGICAL LEAP WAS TRULY HISTORIC, AND I COMMEND PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT AND CELEBRATE HIS ENDURING LEGACY.

SINCE THE FIRST REFUGE WAS ESTABLISHED IN OUR STATE IN 1912, THE WISCONSIN REFUGE SYSTEM HAS BECOME AN INTEGRAL PART OF LIFE FOR OUR CITIZENS. OUR FIVE WILDLIFE REFUGES AND TWO WETLANDS MANAGEMENT DISTRICTS ATTRACT NEARLY TWO MILLION VISITORS EACH YEAR. THEY PROVIDE CRITICAL HABITAT FOR OUR STATE'S

WORLD-RENOWNED WILDLIFE RESOURCES, AS WELL AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECREATION AND GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH.

HORICON MARSH, COVERING 32,000 ACRES, IS THE LARGEST FRESH WATER CATTAIL MARSH IN THE UNITED STATES AND IS DESIGNATED AS A "WETLAND OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE." TREMPLEAU, THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER, AND HORICON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES ARE DESIGNATED AS "GLOBALLY IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS." AND Necedah National Wildlife Refuge serves as the summer home for research experiments with the migration of highly endangered whooping cranes.

I WONDER WHETHER THE PRESIDENT KNEW WHAT HE WAS SETTING IN MOTION WHEN HE SET ASIDE THOSE FIVE SEEMINGLY INCONSEQUENTIAL ACRES. COULD HE POSSIBLY HAVE DREAMED THAT SUCH HUMBLE BEGINNINGS WOULD FLOURISH INTO THE GRAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM THAT WE BOAST TODAY? THAT SYSTEM NOW CONSISTS OF MORE THAN 575 INDIVIDUAL UNITS AND ENCOMPASSES OVER 95 MILLION ACRES. REFUGES CAN BE FOUND IN EVERY STATE IN THE UNION, PROTECTING MORE THAN 250 THREATENED OR ENDANGERED PLANTS AND ANIMALS, INCLUDING SUCH BELOVED AND SYMBOLIC SPECIES AS THE MANATEE, BALD EAGLE, AND CALIFORNIA JEWELFLOWER. THESE FIGURES FAR EXCEED ANY EXPECTATIONS THAT PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

MAY HAVE HAD. OUR REFUGE SYSTEM IS TRULY A TRIUMPH OF
AMERICAN VISION AND COMMITMENT TO RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP OF
OUR UNPARALLELED NATURAL HERITAGE.

I AM PROUD TO SUPPORT THE NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE IN
ITS VITAL MISSION AND GRATEFUL TO BE ABLE TO PASS THIS LEGACY ON
TO FUTURE GENERATIONS OF AMERICANS.